



George Hill

Oral History Transcription

Sept. 9, 2003 [Tape 1, Side B]

Interviewed by:	Les Lamon and David Healey
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Transcribed by:	Howard Dukes, staff, Civil Rights Heritage Center
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Summary:	George Hill was a graduate and star basketball player at Washington High School who spent his career working in politics and and as an employment counselor and job trainer for various city, county and federal programs.

0:00:18 [GH]: Gene was the son, I mean, and Ray was the father. It was a father and son business. It's on the corner right now... the building is still there. It's on the corner of Moss and Keller road. Moss and... You go out by the airport...

[LL]: Ok.

[GH]: As you pass the airport, the first street left is Moss Road.

[LL]: Ok

[GH]: And it's right on the corner of Moss and Keller.

[LL]: Ok.

0:00:42 [GH]: Cuz a doctor is right there on the street there. Right now. Is still there. The building is still there. Gene died in a plane accident. I don't know [inaudible] straight up. So, I was in there working. A laborer. Temporary. We were putting a roof on. And it wasn't any blacks in the place, and we went back and forth back and forth back and forth. And so I was talking one day and he asked me you know if somebody set a machine up could I... run it and I said sure. So, one day he said come on in here and he said I was going to hire a guy so we set it up we ran it then pretty soon I was watching a guy set it up and the machine broke down and I just set it back up again and I was running it and then he came by and said that tool lasts a long time I said no, that tool broke two hours ago. I just changed tools. And he got scared. He ran and checked the piece. He said it was ok. So, then it was cool. I kind of slid in that way. And then what happened I worked there, but I wasn't making any money.

0:01:58 [LL]: I was going to say did they pay you what a lathe operator would make?

[GH]: Nah... They didn't.

[LL]: Ok.

[GH]: They didn't at all as a matter of fact... Nah... they didn't at all. That's when I got called back to Rockwell, but I was a laborer at Rockwell and then I took the test for skilled trades. I passed it. And... If they knew I was black I wouldn't have passed it. But see all the black fellas were either working on the line or in a group. They only had so many... everybody knew who the blacks were in the plant, and here I come in new guy and,

boom, I look up on the board just got back in there I supposed to go back in the group and help clean up I looked up on the board and saw that job and bidded on it. So, they didn't know who George Hill was. So what happened I took the test, and I asked one of the union reps after a while I hadn't heard nothing. And I said did I get the job? He looked at me he didn't ask what my name was he said nah. Said some guy we can't find scored 93 on the test. He said his name is George Hill you know him I said that's me. He was shocked. And then people told me, people tried to talk me out of it. They couldn't talk me out of it... I mean that couldn't say you can't get it. They could talk me out of it. I said nah. So, I had a rough time with it at first.

0:03:46 [LL]: Now, where is Rockwell?

[GH]: It's where they make the Hummer at now.

[LL]: Ok.

[GH]: The plant closed in 1967.

[LL]: The one out there on Chippewa?

[GH]: No, the one out there on 20

[LL]: Oh, out that way. Mishawaka?

[GH]: Yeah.

[LL]: Oh, ok.

[GH]: Rockwell Standard. They made bumpers for Chrysler

[DH]: So, you got the job because they didn't know you were black?

[GH]: They didn't know I was black. No. I never would have passed that test if they knew I was black. Because, he looked at me and telling me and after that I had too many people telling me calling me and trying to talk me out of it they didn't talk me out now. I'm not gon' lie on them. They can't say you didn't get it or they didn't try to change the scores.

0:04:29 [LL]: Too late for that.

[GH]: It was too late for it.

[DH]: And these were white people.

0:04:33 [GH]: Oh yeah. Yeah they gave me. If I was hot headed I wouldn't have made it. I tell those guys... I tell the young guys that all the time they get out of prison. Guy comes to me and says... coffee wasn't but a dime those days. Guy gives me two dimes and says go get coffee. I say how you like your coffee. He says like I like my women, hot and black. I looked at him. But I had to eat it. But when I got in the union I'mma be true with you. When I got in the union that all had to stop. Because I knew the president of the company... I mean, I knew the personnel director and the plant manager I knew everybody. So, I had some clout. So, I didn't take that no more. You gotta be right. You gon' be Christian people you don't be threatening them. I didn't do that.

0:5:26 [LL]: So, the union gave you some protection.

[GH]: It gave you protection, and I knew how to play the game too you know if I started calling people names and threatening them and cutting tires and stuff like that, I would be gone. That's what they expected. You know they... I did everything boom boom. So, after a while they guys said we better leave him alone. He's not gon' break.

[LL]: When was this? Sounds almost like it would have been in the early '60s

[GH]: Early '60s. The plant closed in '67.

[LL]: Ok. What was the union that you were in?

[GH]: UAW.

[LL]: UAW. Who was the head of the UAW here?

[GH]: Bill Gray was at one time, and then... Bill Gray, he was a strong... strong as... after that I think his name was Aranowski. When the plant was going strong it was a fella named Bill Gray.

0:06:38 [LL]: Any black leadership in the union at all?

[GH]: No. What happened you had a fella by the name of Bob Gaines was out there. Bob had some education and the plant was getting ready to close but it hadn't closed yet and Bob... I'm sure Bob was going to run for president. And they came to me and asked me they said why don't you get

in there too. Said we'd rather have you than Bob. No, you want me to split the vote. You don't either one of us, but you specifically don't want Bob, so you talked to me and he might have talked to Bob too then he said well... then it got kind of shaky and it shaken him a little bit, and then he said let's not vote at all. They said the factory is going close anyway. They had put the word out.

0:07:27 [LL]: Is Gaines still here in town?

[GH]: Yeah, he just retired. He was a supervisor.

[LL]: But he's still alive?

[GH]: Yeah.

[LL]: He's black?

[GH]: Yeah, he's black. He's a supervisor for... retired from Bendix he's still there from Bendix. Real sharp... Nickname is Zeke. He was real sharp guy.

[LL]: But he was active in the union.

[GH]: I'm sure he was getting ready to run you know he was getting ready to run he wasn't no officer. No black was an office... they had one officer one time he died his name was Tony Stevenson. He was a union guide and then they... they... matter of fact the guy that beat Tony out he knew that racially he.... Could beat Tony so he just ran against Tony as the guide.

[LL]: That's just... Each time we interview somebody, we pick up more names have to decided that we might want to look at the UAW it seems like I'm going back now they had they had been maybe more open to... I don't know about black... something about black leadership, but they gave some money to Hering House to buy... there was an annex to Hering House.

0:08:48 [GH]: Yeah yeah yeah. I remember yeah

[LL]: And that started out, I believe that was a World War II building and then I think they bought it from the UAW. They gave them money to buy it. It was \$500 bucks. So, they had at least seemed to pay more attention to the black community than some of the others.

[GH]: Yeah, they were probably more liberal than the rest of them

[LL]: Yeah yeah. You had people like Walter Reuther and others involved.

[GH]: They were just a... they were just... as a matter of fact, they were... they had people in position to just say change it. That's what happened at Rockwell. See Rockwell... I went in with another white fella and the lower clock because I had a higher score than him. They lower the clock number, the more seniority you had, even if it was only one point. So they gave me the higher number and gave the white guy the lower number, and Bill Gray he... he was from the south, Ok. But Bill Grey was President of the union and he was one of those guys... Bill Grey was strong and he didn't want no body to challenge him. He was cocky and arrogant, and he didn't like challenges and so when he went in there he didn't like... the way to told him that there he said he should be glad to have his job talking about me Bill Grey said well yeah you did him wrong and somebody said something that he didn't like. I didn't think he was so much for me I think it was just they were questioning his authority.

0:10:37 [LL]: His authority his position yeah.

[GH]: He came and told me cuz I... I wasn't even checking on it.

[LL]: Yeah

[GH]: He came and told me said told me about it then he said I made them change it

[LL]: So you're seniority position got changed

[GH]: Oh yeah. I moved up I had more seniority than the white fella but that's what I say about being... remember I told you I went in and took all that stuff? But then I changed they had to treat me like a complete man after I getting the union.

[LL]: After you got in the union.

0:11:09 [GH]: Oh yeah, I bumped that guy. I bumped him. Had numbers on him and he had another job. And he threatened me he said you better boom boom and I said well nah that's not going I had up with him he backed up and I think he quit. But and I always tell black folks hey man wait a minute you guys look buy Kenny Rogers records you gotta know when to hold 'em and when to fold 'em. That's it. I mean it's not what you do it's how

you do it. I've had dudes who on some strong stuff but your time has got to be right. It's like rebounding, you know. And all that hollering and threatening and I'll be back. It ain't work. You gotta play the man's game. You playing right into his game when you start doing that. You gotta know how to play his game, and you play it as well as him you got what he gets. But you gotta be able to play it. And that's what I try to tell them. That's what happened out there it was oh yeah it was I mean crazy but I got through it. I tell people I'm surprised when I was younger that I was able to take that then because I was still single and I just I had I knew they wanted me to blow up every day. I knew they wanted me to blow up and it was... just crazy stuff out there but I got through it and that's what...

0:12:48 [LL]: The same about Jackie Robinson. Just terrible pressure but he knew that's what they were waiting on him to do and...

[GH]: That's what I tell those guys. My two favorite as far as sports is Jackie Robinson and Joe Louis because I know what they went through. I know what they went through and when I was downtown and I was in that federal program I would always support those guys - especially those black guys that was in those hot seats. I knew they... I'd always support them and they'd appreciate it because we'd close the door and talk. I'd say man, you don't carry yourself as a big wheel people think you do because of your position your salary. But I know better than that and I'd say you don't have to tell me your personal business and they'd say no I have to talk to somebody. Close the door. And then he'd... It was always you remember I worked for the department when I we had a regional director regional director of the Department of Labor, and I got to know this guy real well. As a matter of fact they used to accuse him of favoring me. But I knew my job I did the job honest never messed with any money never sold any jobs no no, no that's why now retired I don't have to worry about them jumping at me because ain't nothing out there. And I know it, see. And that's why I can talk that way you could say man so and so taking but no let me tell you what he did he did this he did this he did this no, no and I tell guys all the time don't.

0:14:20 [LL]: Don't worry about that.

[GH]: Yeah don't worry about that. Don't cut no deal with nobody. Just be straight. Don't do nothing. Don't do nothing that people gotta live down for you. And I tell...

[LL]: That they can use against you.

[GH]: I tell them this I say they were talking about Kobe. Fella came by last night that works those kind of jobs. I said do what you gotta do and if anything is shaky the women, money, anything else. Here's what you gotta do brother. Told him last night in the driveway. You gotta say the worst thing that can happen is you get caught. So, plan on getting caught. It's like a scale. Put all that on a scale put getting caught on a scale too. Now if you can live with that if you can live with damage to your reputation, family, friends, maybe going to jail. If you can live with all that go and do it because you can stand it.

0:15:32 [LL]: If it's worth that much to you.

[GH]: If it's worth that much to you then you can do it but I'ma tell you put it on the scale now, but if you can't afford to eat that man don't bite it don't mess with it he looked at me and said you make a lot of sense. That's why I came by here. I told you before about this he said that's right but keep pumping. Nah, he said you. you.... yeah he I said like we were talking about Kobe I said he's in the league 7 years I'm not saying what a guy won't do, but I was talking to a guy at a big cookout over some people's house, and these guys are intellectuals, you know professional people. And they compare some people and they came to my table and I was sitting down eating and he came to my table and asked what did I think and I said I don't know whether he did it or not. I wasn't trying to guess because I wasn't there. I said but if that did happen I said how did he get in... he's in LA running around the corner from Hollywood what got me was how did he duck all that heavy stuff to fall for something that light.

[DH]: I had a question you mentioned that you mentioned Oliver. They put all the African-American students into the trades.

0:16:54 [GH]: Yeah, it was the fellas.

[DH]: You didn't have any counselors taking to you about going to college

[GH]: Nah, never... That's unheard of

[DH]: So, they put you in a trade that you knew you couldn't find a job at in South Bend. How did you... how did you...

[GH]: We didn't know no better. Parents. If parents don't participate... my parents never came to open house. I mean. I don't know anyone... I don't know anyone when we left Oliver... I don't know anyone in my group - and these were athletes, also - who said they were going to college.

[LL]: Would that did that change at. Washington? I mean did you get any better counseling?

[GH]: Well, I wasn't that good an athlete, so I wasn't thinking about it. But at Washington you... it changed because you started looking at people playing college basketball you playing... I led the whole city in scoring and you played against them. Your taste got a little better you know what I'm talking about. It exposed you a little bit. You started talking to you and you started getting that kind of respect from the principal. The principal started giving you respect. The teacher started introducing you to their kids after the game, and stuff like that that never happened to us at Oliver. We never got that kind of respect. Not at all. So, they would just have... they would sit down and talk to white kids and say you may be pretty good in this might want to think about... what do you want to do. They asked us I'd walk in they'd say [inaudible].

0:18:35 [LL]: At Washington did you have a counselor anybody there at the high school?

[GH]: Yeah. At Washington that's the advantage of being a basketball star. I was treated real good. I tell you... we kid back and forth the we talk to guys about that. They would say you really got along with the white boys... the white people real well at Washington. I say I know I did I made a joke out of it though I'd say they treat me better than the white boys.

[LL]: Because you played ball better than they did. Did you know Mr. Orgain out there

[GH]: I knew Chuck reall well. Real well.

[LL]: One of the thjngs that people have said is that that there weren't really any black counselors at Washington. and he ended up being everybody's counselor.

0:19:32 [GH]: That's right. Chuck... let me tell you about Chuck Orgain. Matter of fact when Chuck was sick he was calling me from Healthwin I was trying got get somebody to do...

[LL]: Is he at Healthwin now?

[GH]: Oh yeah I was trying to do something to his house a couple of times yeah. But he Chuck... I'm glad you mentioned his name. See, when I went to school I tell the kids this now we didn't have one black janitor. Forget a

teacher. We didn't have a black janitor when I was in school. Well, when I was in high school, Chuck was a Washington fan, so Chuck was all our fathers in sports because our parents didn't come to the games. So when I was playing, I could always hear Chuck, 'come on come on Washington.' I could always hear his voice up there and if I did something wrong, he would holler out there at me. I hear him yeah just like a parent because my mother and father didn't come to the games. He'd say, 'come on Hill. Come on get back get back.' I could hear him all the time up there. Come on Washington. Big Washington fan.

0:20:45 [LL]: He was janitor there was he?

[GH]: He was a janitor at Harrison I think.

[LL]: Oh at Harrison.

[GH]: He was never the janitor at Washington.

[LL]: Ok, it was Harrison.

[GH]: But he was a Washington fan.

[LL]: Oh, I see. OK

[GH]: So he was there cheering all of us along.

[LL]: Ok.

[GH]: All those black kids in our time especially the Washington kids he was like our father in the stands.

[DH]: Why didn't your parents come to games? Were they... did they not feel welcome?

[GH]: Well you know they came from the south and probably didn't feel real comfortable taking to the teachers.

[LL]: They did not have a lot of education.

[GH]: Nah. Nah. Nah. No but they never...

[LL]: Did you ever have any black teachers?

[GH]: No.

[LL]: Ok.

0:21:39 [GH]: No. Only down in Central State. Down there. I think Vas did some student teaching at Washington in 54, but we never had... I tell those kids right now... I say man I tell these kids right now. Man, you have it fair all you have to do is go to school and try to do something.

[LL]: You... you lived on the east side for down south side. The issues having to do with schools eventually came to center around sort of de facto segregation that we've had. I mean you had a few people who went to Washington you had a few in other places but you had Linden school being an almost all black school. Did you... were you aware of that... that kind of way in which the school corporation dealt with... I don't wanna say integration or the lack of integration. Where you aware of that growing up?

0:22:44 [GH]: Yes, sure. My wife went to Linden.

[LL]: Ok

[GH]: And you had Lewis and Peggy Flowers and all them . The first black teachers that's where they put them all.

[LL]: Put them all at Linden

[GH]: At Linden, Ed Myers was the principal. They all put them there... oh yeah in fact people knew that.

[LL]: They knew that. That was an understood...

[GH]: Understood thing. That's right.

[LL]: Ok. What about... you talked about sort of making it downtown in '72. Was downtown South Bend a place that you went at all as a kid a student or even in the 1960s.

[GH]: No, the only time we'd go is to go to the show we'd go down on Sunday's. Probably once a week we'd go down to the show.

[LL]: The show.

[GH]: Yeah.

[LL]: As a kid did you sit anywhere you want or was there any restriction on your seating?

[GH]: When I was a senior in high school downtown. A senior in high school you couldn't eat downtown in Indianapolis when I was a senior.

[LL]: Yeah.

0:23:57 [GH]: No they had... when I was a senior in high school we could eat at Walgreen's and Hooks. I don't recall anywhere that we couldn't eat. They had a little... a couple a little restaurants around there that would give you a rough time, but the main chains they had more or less broke that loose when I got through there.

[LL]: Ok, oh right.

[GH]: I had older folks that used to work with me. Norma Ganaway

[LL]: Oh yeah

[GH]: She'd tell how they sent her in and how they did this. Norma's real mild mannered anyway but she was doing it.

[LL]: Yeah there were some sit-ins. There were some boycotts that kind of thing that did occur. Certainly, in our talking with other people there were a number of restaurants downtown that wouldn't serve you.

[GH]: Yeah.

[LL]: And who was I talking to the other day? Aw, did you know Ruby Garrett Joyce?

0:24:57 [GH]: Yes

[LL]: I'm going to go to interview - her she lives in Washington now, but she was telling me on the phone that there was some restaurant out on Western. She remembers that she was in a hurry to get to a meeting out at Harrison or something like that.

[GH]: Ok.

[LL]: And went in and they didn't want to serve her.

[GH]: She was before me. I'm sure she ran into.... Ruby was... As a matter of fact I think Ruby was... Ruby was the valedictorian.

[LL]: That I don't know.

[GH]: Yeah, she was. She was the valedictorian at Washington.

[LL]: So, she went to Washington?

[GH]: I think she was the first black valedictorian.

[LL]: Ok. That's something I can ask her too.

[GH]: Yeah.

[LL]: David, do you have anything else?

[DH]: Yeah. When you said when you left Rockwell. Rockwell closed up and you went to Bendix.

[GH]: [nods yes].

0:25:47 [DH]: How did you... did you just walk in and apply for a job? Did you here I am and they hired you? What did you...

[GH]: Well, you know it's truly funny. No. You remember I told you I didn't transfer schools right? And Bob Clowitter the same group I was in but he went to Jefferson and Adams. He was a basketball star over there. So, I knew him I always competed against him. Now, like I said at Oliver I was sitting on the bench when we played against him, but when I was a freshman I started playing first string he played first string for Adams and then the sophomore I played JV against him, and I played varsity against him the last two years, so I knew him and Bob ended up being a big man in personnel at Bendix.

[DH]: So, we have this continuity of sports throughout your whole life.

[LL]: Athletic fraternity

0:26:41 [GH]: So, I had no problems. As a matter of fact after Bob got that job I got the... I was downtown I got a whole lotta folks in Bendix and the funny thing he said about it is when he retired. He didn't die... he died when he was 62 years old. When he... when... when... I went to him I said... I really

appreciate all the favors you did for me in hiring all those folks at Bendix. This what he said to me. He said that wasn't friendship he said every time we were hiring my boss would tell me to call you. You would give me better people than we were getting off the streets. I don't think it was friendship I felt bad even thinking it was about friendship and then I felt pretty good that I was doing a real good job. He said nah, you were giving me good people, and I did. I wasn't sending nobody out there that I think wouldn't work. I wasn't taking no chances out there. Oh yeah, so I didn't have no problems with that. And I worked with him real close... I worked... I helped quite a few. He didn't have one bad incident with anyone I ever gave him. No one ever got fired.

0:27:57 [LL]: That's quite a record.

[GH]: And I didn't think about that until after he told me that. I just thought we were just friends because I could go in there... He'd call me and we could sit and talk for hours at a time. He'd say you got some people and I'd say yeah he'd say where they at and he'd just put them to work. I always had people that wanted to take care of their families. And I had two or three different groups... Downtown I ran the ex-offender program so we'd spend the... I had a program where if you had have served some serious time even to get in. We had four guys they called them the Roaming leaders. [inaudible] knew about that Roaming leaders and they were all, Dr. [get name] was human resource director he got hired. Jerry Miller hired him and he was for really helping the street guys and so he picked up a lot of the fellas that helped Jerry get elected, and he was for that that was in his heart. So, you know it all fell in and then Jerry was real liberal too and he had a real liberal cabinet so I had no problem I got a real good start.

0:29:02 [DH]: Yeah, of course. It sounds like it...

[GH]: Oh yeah, I got a real good start.

[LL]: Were there any other African-Americans in the... in his cabinet or in his...

[GH]: No, no.

[LL]: You were the only one.

[GH]: No. I wasn't in the cabinet but I... with the authority I was right there with them. No, there wasn't any more there but I had no problem with any

of those fellas as I sat back and think about it racially I still see them now we grab each other now and it's like the old days straight up. You know it's just... Jerry only lasted four years. I think he was ahead of his time.

[LL]: Yeah.

[GH]: You know I mean you gotta cater to some party people the clubs and stuff like that and maybe...

[LL]: Was it Nemeth that beat him?

[GH]: Pardon.

[LL]: Was it Nemeth?

[GH]: Nemeth beat him real bad.

[LL]: Yeah.

[GH]: Yeah, yeah

[LL]: Now was Nemeth connected with back with the old guard?

0:29:59 [GH]: Nemeth's father... his father was an old politician, and then Nemeth... when he got elected see although I was working on... I was on the federal side working with the I wasn't really on city payroll but they ran the grant through the mayor's office and he was on the board. I'm not saying they couldn't... I'm not saying that... I'm sure that if they made a big enough effort they could have fired me, but... and I worked real hard against... I went down with Jerry Miller, and Nemeth knew it.

[LL]: Yeah.

[GH]: Cuz they could feel me. Out there. Ok, but soon as he got soon as we won his people they called me after they knew we had got beat and you know...

[LL]: Kept you on.

[GH]: And they wanted me to stay.

0:30:55 [LL]: And you stayed on through several other administrations after that.

[GH]: Yeah, yeah.

[LL]: I just had one other thing and I was remembering something that George McCollugh told me and you sort of alluded to it too. You said you're kind of a historian yourself. And you keep a lot of history and collect a lot of things. What did he mean by that?

[GH]: He probably means scrap books and stuff.

[LL]: Is that what he means?

[GH]: Yeah.

[LL]: Because he said you collect.

[GH]: Oh yeah, I got scrap books and stuff at home.

[LL]: Is this...

[GH]: I got pictures of Oliver the Hering house softball team we played baseball.

[LL]: Yeah

[GH]: Let me tell you something real quick. You got a little time?

[LL]: Yeah.

[GH]: Ok.

[DH]: We have more tapes don't worry.

[LL]: We can get more tapes if we need them

0:31:45

[GH]: What we did is just to show you what happens... and that's when I dealt with those ex-offenders and talk with fellas and tell them you might have went to prison for something you didn't do, but you saddled with it. Now what are you going to do are you going to give up or are you going to shake it loose and still live with it? Because you gotta live with it now. Now you served the time already the citizens said you did it so let's plan on you did it, and you didn't I know it and I can't do nothing about it and you can't do nothing about it. So, let's go along. I can tell a whole lot but you not the only one. I can tell you about a guy who built a new house out here he got

out three years ago and he didn't... they got him too see he don't realize that can happen so he's the only one. But you gotta roll on with it but what happened is we played ball out here with the white boys I got pictures and stuff. We played ball with the white boys and every year we got a picture in the paper trip to Chicago. I got pictures at home and I'll show it to you. I got a picture at home. Bob Rush pitched they named the Riley field after him. He pitched that Sunday he took me down... I got a picture of me sitting there on Wrigley field and they played against the Dodgers that day. Played against the Jackie Robinson, Don Newcombe, Roy Campanella.

0:33:09 [LL]: Gil Hodges

[GH]: The Dodgers. Duke Snider and all those guys

[LL]: Carl Erksine, Carl Fierello. See, I was a Dodger fan.

[GH]: See what happened we win the championship - we won the championship we get a jacket a suit from Local 5. Nice jacket. Nice winter jacket when I retired there was a big article in the paper, I said that was my winter coat I'll send you the article. It said if I hadn't won the championship I'd be cold that winter. I don't think my sisters... a couple of sisters liked it everybody don't want to go back to living poor because they live pretty good now. But that's just how I felt. And that was my winter coat so Lee and I we were playing for a winter coat. At least I was. He's dead now maybe his family doesn't like that. But I was playing for a winter coat. Well - so what happened we got so powerful that the other white parks would start... I heard a rumor make that black guys... those colored guys they should play where they live. They living over in the ghetto what they doing over in Walker field playing? Without those two guys they wouldn't be city champs. See at first they might want us but now we too powerful we make this team the best team in the city. Well, so what and they had a pretty prominent group out there so they ain't gotta cow to nobody and strong coach too he's strong downtown well Mr. Dickson at the Hering House

0:34:40 [LL]: Jesse Dixson?

[GH]: No Luther Dixson. See I played baseball with the white boys we called and played softball it was all black, Hering House. We're city champs in the sheriff department league every year. We were pretty tough. We were coached by Winston Vas. Winston ended up coaching it. Ok so tough that what we did is maybe a little cocky. We let the other team pick an all-star team we played against them. Beat them 11-0. That's

how tough we were. So, the next year Mr. Dixon, I mean Luther and the guys I played with said, 'hey man if you and Lee McKnight would play with us at Oliver park we could win the championship. And we kept saying no two of us won't make that much difference. We kept saying those white boys is tough we ain't helping that much. We just play out there but they can probably win it without us. They said they ain't winning without you if you play over here with us we can win it. You two guys plus these are guys we grew up with and we liked and we kept saying nah. So Mr. Dixon Hering House. I'm already had us playing softball with the group. I got pictures at home. Already played softball with the group. He said George say you're not gonna play high school baseball I said nah. You don't owe Mr. Szabo that much do you? I said nah I said nah I didn't [inaudible] one more year. You tell him you coming back out there this year. I said nah but I was gonna go because Mr. Szabo was like god to me I played... he said so I found out Fred Odush the pitcher was going to play for Riley – Spike Kelly at Riley. I said I heard Odush ain't going back. Well he's not going back. I'm not going back out there cuz I was catching and playing second base. I was the best hitter on the team well let me... so Mr. Dixon said - but also cared equally... I thought as much of Mr. Dixon as I did of Mr. Szabo now... he said you play with us at Oliver this summer over here with these guys I said yeah. He said telling me I said I'm telling you I will play. So, I went by Lee's house and told Lee that I told Mr. Dixon we was gon' play...

0:37:20 [LL]: At Oliver instead of Walker

[GH]: Lee said ok I'm with you man. Said the boys gon' be happy. Well, the boys wasn't happy... let me tell you what happened. When the word got out that we was gon' play at Oliver every black around town came over there so that we had a black all-star team. I didn't ask those guys to come, but word got out.

[LL]: You had virtually a black team then.

[GH]: All black we won the championship.

[LL]: How old were you at this stage? Probably about 14?

0:37:55 [GH]: 15. Probably 15 going on 16. But let me tell you what happened. Mo Aranson. Mo was the coach. He ran the parks ok we got together we moved together, so they wouldn't let us play at JD Oliver park because they said the center field fence was too short. Cuz I Albert's steak house was right in the center field of the park, so they told us we had to play our

home games at Pulaski, so we really couldn't play even our home but we bought that we played across the tracks. Mr... Coach Mo had to stay in the park so he couldn't... we had to coach our own selves. They figured that would stop us. So Herbie Lee who played at Central when they won state and guy called Hot Shot... the three of us ran the team and the guys just bought it. Lee... Lee...

[LL]: Where's Pulaksi?

[GH]: Right across the tracks

[LL]: Ok on the over there where you used to live?

[GH]: Where Oliver park is right across the tracks.

[LL]: Ok

[GH]: Pulaksi

[LL]: Ok

0:39:00 [GH]: So, the guys bought the leadership I mean usually you wouldn't let guys your own age tell you what to do but because we were so potent they said Ok. They let us tell them. We decided who was going to pitch who was going to bat. We even cut. I mean you very seldom will cut your own peers and then the other guys on the bench sat there and they were happy.

[LL]: They accepted it.

[GH]: Yeah, they accepted it man they were so happy because they got... we came home and they... we came home and we won against what... the same one same system same park system, no jacket, no trip to Chicago, no picture in the paper. And that team was probably better telling the truth now that team was probably better than the team we had with the white boys.

0:39:57 [LL]: Who was responsible for that? Who gave you the trip?

[GH]: Well, we didn't have a sponsor. See the Oliver Jaycees see out there we had sponsors.

[LL]: So, the sponsors paid for your jackets.

[GH]: Yeah, I'm sure that they did. We got the jackets and their name was on it. We got the jackets. The only thing we got was to be on TV.

[LL]: Could we look at those sometimes?

[GH]: Sure...

[LL]: Would you mind if we made some copies?

[GH]: No. Go ahead sure.

[LL]: I think that would be...

[GH]: Yeah...

[DH]: Did you take any pictures of Uncle Bill's team? At all? He was Uncle Bill's team was probably winding down pretty much because they were...

[GH]: Yeah they were... I remember... Ladies... I remember the ladies as a matter of fact my neighbor... she just died across the street from me she played, and Norma Grady and Spencer and Berry kept getting the trophy and taking it not took long ago from his sister and Brumell that was Tom Buchanon's wife. She played. I used to watch them play.

0:41:06 [DH]: Renelda Robinson?

[GH]: Yeah Renalda, yeah.

[DH]: She played first base

[GH]: Yeah yeah. I saw them play. I was a little boy. See we didn't have a whole lot of recreation. The only thing he had to look forward to was going to the park in the summer time and then maybe we'd get 12 cents hustle 12 cents the show cost 12 cents and if we could hustle 12 cents and go to the show and that's something we had to look forward to in the summer time. The park opened up and Oliver was the you know we went that route, but I got pictures.

[LL]: That would be something that would be nice if we could...

[GH]: Well sure.

[LL]: David has copied from a number of people their pictures and then we put them in a on a disc and you know.

[DH]: Then we scan them in.

[LL]: We got a CD.

[GH]: Oh yeah I got them. Sure you can see them.

[LL]: It would be nice if we could preserve them.

0:42:00 [GH]: I got the Hering house picture. Some the back of Oliver we got the where the tracks were. No I was like you say and they black they talk about the Hering House all the time.

[LL]: Oh yeah. Actually, I had a student who graduated she did her master's thesis on the history of the Hering House.

[GH]: Is that right?

[LL]: She called me yesterday she now teaches down in Atlanta. Lisa Swedarsky. I don't know whether she's...

[GH]: I know her father.

[LL]: You knew her father?

[GH]: Her dad. Is he dead?

[LL]: No, he's still living. Isn't he?

[GH]: Yeah her father; still living.

[LL]: He's still living? He ended up in some difficulties was gone for a while.

[GH]: She went to Riley right.

[LL]: Yeah.

[GH]: Yeah

[LL]: Yeah well Lisa did...

[GH]: When he got out, I helped her father.

[LL]: Oh yeah OK.

0:42:57 [GH]: When he got out, I got him a job. I'm sure I did.

[LL]: Well, you know her brother Lenny just got married recently.

[DH]: Whole raft of sisters too.

[GH]: Yep.

[DH]: Just a couple of questions? When you're going out the black leadership in the community was pretty much past tense like attorneys Allen, Wills and JC Smith. But you had other leaders in the community like Jess Dickinson and he worked at Bendix too for a period of time. Did you ever have any communication with Mr. Dickinson?

[GH]: Dickinson, we lived on the same street. See, in 1952 you know where the projects in on South Bend Avenue?

[DH]: Yeah.

[GH]: That big house on the corner right across the street.

[DH]: Across the street.

[GH]: Yeah got the big old fence my brother fixed it up my brother... that was our house.

[DH]: Ok, oh, ok

[GH]: Well Dickinson lived on that same street. I knew him because he lived on Talbott Avenue. Too. The same street where Deguch a policeman got shot.

[LL]: That's right. And where Frankie's barbeque is now.

0:44:01 [GH]: Further down.

[LL]: Further down a little further down.

[GH]: Yeah, yeah. Well you asked about Jesse Dickinson because him and the highest ranking black police officer, Al Pope lived next door to him. Yeah, I know the Dickinsons, Valjean, Carole. They were older than us, but I knew Jess... well, I got to know Jess anyway. I got to know him real well Dickinson, Jess was you see we were neighbors in 1952. Moved right on the corner by him. Jess was probably, if you talk about the system, I would say Jess Dickinson was the most powerful black man in South Bend because if you were black and you went downtown - I call the white boys - you'd be in bad shape if you were down there talking about Jesse Dickinson. I mean he wouldn't have to do nothing to you. You do something to yourself if you went down there talking about Jesse Dickinson. So, you ask me if. was gonna say of all that group you named you named some fellas that I all knew them if you name me who was the most powerful I would say Dickinson was on the shelf all by himself. See Dickinson was not only a state representative, he was a state senator and he ran in an area where he had to have a whole lotta white votes that didn't like black folks and he was getting them. So that's got to tell you something. Somebody was saying was saying drop it on him.

0:45:41 [DH]: Yeah.

[GH]: He was powerful and he carried himself... see back when we were talking about putting himself on the shelf and doing some things that he's scandal free.

[DH]: I had never seen a picture of the man where he wasn't totally dressed perfect.

[GH]: Yeah.

[DH]: Immaculate.

[GH]: Scandal free all that time with all that heat. That's a good example you name some folks that all had good clout, but if you talking about a person who had some powerful clout I mean if a white person jumped on him and didn't know who he was that guy would be in trouble.

[LL]: Would you speculate as to how he got that? I mean scandal free I hear you saying, but how did he get so...

0:46:35 [GH]: He got hooked up with some. You had some people like the Dorans and Doran and Everett Smith you had some older politicians that kind of ran South Bend.

[LL]: Yeah. What was Doran's name, Bob?

[GH]: The old man. Somebody took a liking to him ok? Someone took a liking to him.

[Audio ends]